

Guildford No. Meeting.

Just Measures,
IN AN
EPISTLE,
OF
PEACE & LOVE
TO

Such Professors of Truth as are under
any Dissatisfaction about the present
Order practis'd in the

CHURCH OF CHRIST.

By a Lover of the Truth and Them, G. P.

COL. iii. 15.

*And let the Peace of God rule in your
Hearts, to the which also ye are cal-
led in one Body; and be ye thankful.*

L O N D O N :

Printed for Tho. Northcott, in George
yard in Lumbar'd-Street, 1692.

Guildford Meetings



Peabody fund

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Just Measures
 IN AN
EPISTLE
 OF
PEACE & LOVE, &c.

Friends,

I Have, with a deep Sense and Sorrow, often beheld the Distance and Dissatisfaction you are under in reference to your ancient and faithful Brethren and that Fellowship, which, I am sure, was once very dear and valuable with you, and I would have the Charity to hope, is what many of you desire still : And, for your

sakes that would not willingly think amiss, nor differ, nor divide from those that otherwise you have an Esteem for and are in Judgment one with, as to the *Worship and Doctrines of Truth*; I desire to open my Mind, both with tenderness and plainness; and if what I say has the Voice and Matter of *Peace and Love* in it, and may be helpful to you, in closing with your Brethren again, I shall greatly rejoice: In which, know this, I seek you not in the words of *Man's Wisdom*, nor to raise *Controversie*, nor for *Victory*, nor any *By-ends*, but for the sake of that *precious Fellowship and seamless Garment*, in which the *Truth* cloathed us all in the beginning, and with which it will cloath and comfort all its faithful Servants and true Friends to the end. 1st. I shall begin with the *Difference*, and what you have both in *Conference and Writing* alledged for the *Ground of your Dissatisfaction and Dissent*: Next, I shall consider the *Nature and Merit of it*; and last of all, give my sence upon the whole matter, in order to a better understanding for the future.

That there is a *Difference*, is but too plain, for it has in some parts proceeded

to a *Separation*, as well to places of *Worship* as in matters of *Discipline*. The *Ground* of this *Dissatisfaction*, upon which so great a *Distance* has been raised, you say is, *Requiring your Compliance with some Practices relating to Discipline*, particularly *Womens meetings and coming twice before Men and Womens meetings about Marriages, before they are admitted to be solemnized among us*; some of you thinking, that there is no *Service* for *Womens meetings* at all; others, no *Service* in their being distinct from *Mens meetings*, at least, no necessity for either, and therefore no necessary *Compliance* to be required and insisted upon, but every one left to their liberty in *Christ*, lest *Imposition and Formality* should prevail among us, as they have done in other *Religious Societies*. In this, I think, I have truly and fairly stated the Case on your part, and given your *Objection* to our *Practice*, and the reason why you dissent from it.

Now Friends, I shall consider the nature and merit of this *Dissatisfaction* and *Dissent*, wherein I beseech your *Attention*, *Patience*, and *Candour*, and I hope you will find, that we are clear of the *Imposi-*

sition and Formality you object or fear.

In the first place, I do not find that you have any just cause to fear, in general, an infringement on your Christian Liberty, since it has been, and is most sincerely declared by the Brethren, chiefly concerned in the good Order and Service of the Church, that they have no thought or design of imposing any thing upon the Consciences of Friends; or, that Friends ought to have now any more than at the beginning, any other reason or Measure of Compliance or Conformity in Matters relating to God, than the *conviction of the Light and Spirit of Christ in every Conscience*. But there is this distinction to be considered well of, That the matters in Difference are not such as require such an Exercise and Conviction of Conscience as is pleaded, because they relate not to *Faith* or *Worship*. Did they require *Faith*, or did they appertain to *Worship*, as if you were obliged to worship God only in such a *Place, Time, Gesture, Raiment, with such words and forms of Speech, &c.* which has been the case of the *Dissenters* from the *National Church*, your Objection and Plea were good: But this about which your Dis-
tis-

tisfaction arises, is purely *Discipline in Government, and not in Worship; Formality in Order, and not in Religion*: It is about methods of regulating our selves, as to the civil or outward part of the Church, as we are a *Society*; how we may avoid Disorder, and preserve the Credit of our Society from Censure and Scandal.

For instance, *To keep the necessitous; as Poor, Aged, Sick, and Orphans: To reconcile Differences: To take care of Births, Marriages, and Burials*: In fine, *to prevent, rebuke and restore disorderly walkers*. To all which, I conceive, there is no need of an Act of *Faith*, or other Exercise of *Conscience*, than, as the Apostle exhorts, *to be ready to every good word and work*: I mean, here is nothing required to be believed as an *Article of Faith*; here is no *Novelty* or *Formality* in *Worship* introduc'd, or any thing proposed as an End or Service for our *Men and Womens* meetings, that can reasonably admit of the raising of such a Scruple of Conscience, since the things proposed are Duties that all civil Societies, as well as Church-fellowships, agree in, as requisite to the support of the Reputation of *Fellowships and Societies*.

Now this being the *great* and *true End*,
Use, and *Service* of our *Men* and *Womens*
meetings, and that 'tis the *End* that always
denotes and constitutes the nature of the
means, it cannot justly be thought to be
of the nature of *Imposition* and *Formality*,
as the words are commonly taken in an
ill sense, to expect the compliance of
Members of a Society, to such Methods of
Order as the *Elders* thereof have exhorted
to, and the generality of the People have
embraced, and which the most considera-
ble part of those that dissent, declare they
dissent from, rather for fear of suffering an
Enfringement of their Christian Liberty,
than any dislike to the Practice it self: I
say, this cannot be called or accounted such
an Imposition upon Conscience, because
they are *Expedients of Order* and *Methods*
of Rule about things universally agreed up-
on. The *thing* will not bear the word;
for instance, Because I may say it is against
my Conscience to confess to such an Article
or Doctrin of Faith, or to worship God af-
ter such a prescribed form, that therefore
it would sound reasonable for me to say,
it is against my Conscience to submit to the
Council of the Church for ending of Differen-

ces ; and it is against my Conscience, after having once told the Brethren I intend to marry such a Woman, to come again a fortnight, or a month after, to ask if they have informed themselves of mine and the Womans clearness, both towards Parents and other persons, before we solemnize it. Surely this would look to reasonable people an over-tender or an over-righteous, or rather, indeed, an over-free and large Conscience, that would scruple, at twice or thrice publishing the Banns, to prevent undutifulness to Parents and injury to Pre-engagements, when those, we profess to exceed, require in their Communion that it be thrice done. In like manner it would look very strange in me to call a Church-care of circumspect walking up to the religious Principles of the Society, that I have voluntarily embraced, an imposing or over-driving of me.

But you object, *Why must we go before Women, and why Woman apart from Men ?* This still, Friends, can be no Imposition, as is before expressed, because it is *no Matter of Faith, nor Practice of Worship*, but a referring still to our *external Order of Life* ; And we say, *Women as well as Men*, because they are concerned, for they are part of
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the Church of Christ; and the common *Banns* that are published in *Churches* (so called) or *Markets*, exclude not *Women* to make their Exception any more than *Men*. But why *Women* apart, say you? We think for a very good reason; the Church encreaseth, which encreases the Business of the Church, and *Women*, whose bashfulness will not permit them to say or do much as to Church-affairs before the *Men*, when by themselves, may exercise their Gifts of Wisdom and Understanding in a discreet care for their own Sex, at least; which makes up not the least part of the Business of the Church, and this while the *Men* are upon their proper business also. So that as *Men* and *Women* make up the Church, *Men* and *Women* make up the business of the Church; and therefore it is very reasonable they should be *Helpers together*, in doing the Church's business. This way *Women* are made useful and serviceable in and to the Church, as were the *Holy Women* of old, that were so much commended by the Apostle, for *Deaconesses* indeed. And, as I said before, their businesses being hereby distinct, *two businesses are doing at one and the same time*,

time, and consequently, there must needs be a greater dispatch ; which in Country places, and Winter Seasons, where Friends come *Ten or Fifteen miles* to Meetings, must needs be very convenient and comfortable. I may add, that there are divers things that seem peculiar to *Women*, that were not fit for *Men*, and in which *Men* did and would find themselves often at a loss, which renders their distinct Meetings farther convenient.

These are the Reasons and Motives to the present Practice of the Church of Christ, without infringing Christian Liberty, by compelling Conscience to any matter of Faith or Practice, relating to Worship ; we meaning by our whole Order and Government, no other thing than a careful Eye and Check upon Practice ; an Expediency against Irregularity in Conversation, whether towards them that are without, or those that are within the same Communion, to which the strong will submit for the sake of the weak.

My own sence upon this whole matter is, That a misapprehending the Intention of the Brethren, and an undistinguishing zeal against Impositions on the one hand, and a fear

fear on the other side, that those who so mistook and misrendered the design of the Brethren, were either high-minded and unruly, or prone to undue liberty, or that they not being the first promoters of this Discipline in Government, detracted from them that were, and so would lessen the Credit and Authority of their Endeavours, with such as were peculiar Favourers ; and that, in fine, their Dissent tended to the breach of Brotherly Love and Unity in the Church. I say, my sense is, That this on each side, with the heats that followed, perhaps much worse than the thing it self, gave life to the Division that those that fear the Lord have truly mourned for. And since I have hinted the Heats that may have attended the management of this Difference, be not offended that I say, the Difference, through those Heats, is now more in Spirit than Fact, in Mind than Matter : It is come in Fact to this; Whether the care of Conversation should belong to Women as well as Men, especially relating to their own Sex, the Women being so great a part of the Church : And over this, I think, you are got for the most part. 2. Whether the Women may meet separately from the Men;

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And for answer to this, be pleased to take notice of your own unavoidable Concessions : *You allow Meetings of Care in general, and do not deny Women absolutely their share among the Men, and that particular Members must be accountable to the Society they are of, in point of Conversation, according to the Rules embraced by the said Society.* I say, you own the end, you allow the means, you refer the choice of your means to the Society, and you, as well as we, expect a compliance with those Rules. Then the Question is, *Whether in fact Womens meetings be a part of that Discipline the Church admits of ?* And it is evident, that the Church of God does, generally speaking, receive and practise it, with satisfaction and advantage. I would therefore beseech you, Friends, to ponder in your minds, upon what a narrow point your Distance stands, and that the main and tender point is allowed you, *viz. Conscience is free, and unconcern'd in the Question ;* and the visible Ground of Distance being so small, weigh with your selves by what has been, what may be the consequence of this lamentable Breach.

I am as much for *Liberty* as any man ; I ever was so, and hope I ever shall be for it ; but we must refer it to a proper Object , or we shall abuse what we do so much prize, and pervert one of the greatest Priviledges we can pretend to. I do not mean, by the Liberty we are to resign to the Benefit of *Society*, That which is private or personal ; no, this does not enter into private or personal Liberty, concerning which, the Apostles taught us to bear, and not offend one another ; as about Meats and Drinks : I may add Clothes, Houses, Trades, &c. so as there be no Excess, for that is every where wrong : These things regard not *Society*, but a man's self, and his private Liberty alone. What is it to the *Society*, what or when I eat, what sort of Clothing I wear, or House I live in, or Trade I will be of, so as Excess or Uncomeliness be avoided ? This is still in my own power , and many like things, hard to be numbred, about which *Society* is not in the least concerned, nor in which any Member of it is interrupted, or called in question. In the next place, we do also all agree , that

Faith

Faith must not be forced nor Worship constrained, for that grates upon *Conscience*, which God only can effectually enlighten or rightly perswade. But that bears not upon our Question, as I said before ; for the compliance desired in it is about *Order*, not *Faith*, and that not about *Worship*, but *Conversation*, in which if you submit your Liberty, it is for the Good of *Society*, and you have the Returns of in the Benefit and Comfort thereof. Do you serve or take care of others, that before were free of that Engagement ? Others also are tryed by the same Rules, to serve and be concerned for you, that formerly owed you no obligation; and if you are under the Notice and Reproof of others, as to your personal Conduct, they are equally under yours upon occasion ; so that you lose nothing but what you get, nor give nothing but what you receive again, and to a right Spirit and a good Mind this mutual Service will appear reasonable, christian, and requisite. And as in no Age the Resister and Gainsayers of *Care* and *Order*, in any of the Lord's eminent Servants, have passed without the mark of
God's

God's Rebuke; so those that have contested and opposed the Wisdom of God in his faithful Servants, have ever failed of their Purpose, and been finally manifested to have been lead by a wrong Spirit. And as observable it is, that those by whom the Lord has eminently appeared, and who were the first Instruments of his several Dispensations to the Sons of Men, have alwaies exercised that Authority among the People they have gathered, and have been constantly preserved from falling away, though some or other have rise against them with that clamour, as if they had set up themselves, and were gone from what they taught or were, and took too much upon them. But, what have they all come to? Read and Judge.

Nor was it ever heard of in the Dealings of G O D with the Sons of Men, that he varied or changed his Dispensations in the Life-time of the Instruments of any of them, as some have been ready to imagine, nor yet in that Age in which he has brought them forth: Which engages me to beseech you, in the Bowels of the Love of Christ our
only

only Root of Life and Light, and Love and Peace, that you be like minded with your Friends and Brethren, and see that the Life and the Fellowship of the Truth be preserved in the enjoyment and practice of Fellowship; which will be, if the love of God, which first made us love one another, be kept in, for that is a sovereign Antidote against all the *Poyson* of Discontent, evil Jealousie, and the Divisions that are wont to follow. And instead of reproaching our *Elders* and *Brethren*, whom God has honoured, and whom we have honoured, and could have laid down our Lives for, and who know nothing by themselves, but that they are as true to the Lord, and in as good a condition in the Truth as ever they were, and have done, and intended in what they have done, as much the Benefit of the Lord's People I say, instead of reproaching them with *Usurping Authority*, and *taking too much upon them*, let us consider, that those whom we have received with so much reverent Love, and as worthy of double Honour in the greater things, are not

unworthy to be heard and followed by us in *lesser* matters : Let us regard and value their Care, and love them for it. So true is that Saying among Men, *That is well spoken which is well taken*, that the Bent and Purpose of a Man's Spirit is that which gives the Just reason of acceptance or rejection.

You have, dear Friends, judged too much after an *outward appearance*, and, you may see, not truly there neither. *Open therefore your Hearts, your Souls, and Spirits*, and taste with the divine sense of the tender and meek Truth, the aim and end of Brethren : Herein be a little more truly free and universal in your Minds, and you will perceive this Care has a large and a long Prospect for Good. The due exercise of your spiritual Senses will answer all your Objections, and satisfy every upright Soul among you ; but if you *look out, mistake Liberty, mistake Imposition, mistake Formality*, mistake the *nature and end* of things, and the *Intention* of your ancient Friends and Brethren in them, you will judge carnally, and be ready to think as it outward Rule and Lordliness were aimed at, and a departing from the
Truth,

Truth, even whilst our Care, in the sight of the Lord, is for the Honour of it, in reference to the *young*, the *weak*, and such as may be *careless*, and ready to *fall asleep*; for such some yet are, and such are yet like to be; and for their sakes a *Discipline*, as to Conversation, must be, as well as that there are natural Infirmities, as *Sickness*, *Age*, &c. that unavoidably call for it. Nor did or can ever any Community subsist without it; and the Heats, Prejudice, and Rents that have arisen about the How or Manner of it, shew the Opposition not to be right, nor of a good tendency; the end of that Order, in the Minds and Hands of those from whence we joyfully received the Testimony of the Truth, being the Glory of God, and Good of his People, as a *Primitive Christian Society*.

To conclude; As this is not a *Plea for Imposition*, nor *Forms of Worship*, but *Forms of Discipline*, as to the Government and Behaviour of our selves in our Converse both with those that are with-

out, and those that are within, and that there is no visible Communion or Society in this World of Bodies, but what is subject to them, and must in some sort subsist by them ; I beseech you, that we, as becomes a reasonable and modest People, and as *dear Children*, may be of *one Heart*, and *one mind*, and walk together as those that have been Partakers of *one Life*, and that have drank into *one Spirit* ; for, it is a comely thing to see Brethren walk together in Love.

O Friends, let us labour against *secret Animosities, watchings for Evil, Detraction*, the Sin that flung the *Angels* out of their Heavenly Station : Let us see to our own Spirits, how they are, if *meek, lowly, humble, tender*, by which the true and preserving Judgment is only known and felt ; or, if not *high, fierce, hard*, and *prejudiced* ; for a man may come to lose a good frame of Spirit upon very Trifles. It is not alwaies what the Matter is the Dispute arises upon, but *how far the thing*
is

is espoused, and what place a man suffers it to have in his Mind : If Jealousie, Reputation, Revenge, or Contradiction prevail, Division must follow : Some are apt to resent things too soon, and carry it too far, even to Obstinacy, through the Workings of the Evil One in a Mystery ; so that though the presence of the Quarrel may be some Fact or other, yet that has the least share oftentimes in the Difference, it being enflamed and encreased by the *mysterious workings of the Spirit of Strife and Variance in the Mind*, according to an old Saying, *The greatest Feuds oftentimes arise from the slightest Causes*. Let me beseech and prevail with you to read and weigh the Bent and Force of the Apostle's Spirit in *Rom. 12.* also *14. 19. & 15. 4, 5, 6.* and especially *16, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 Verses*. Likewise *1 Cor. 14. 32, 33.* weighty places indeed. *2 Cor. 13. Ephes. 4. 1, 2, 3, 4. Phil. 3. 16, 17, 18. ch. 4. 8, 9. Col. 3. 12, 14, 15, 16. 1 Thes. 5. 12, 13, 14. 2 Thes. 3. 4, 5, 6.* He often commands Order and Obedience

ence to the Apostolick Tradition in this Epistle, *Tit. 1. 15. ch. 2. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7. Heb. 13. 1. And, 1 Pet. 4. 8.* All which *exhort to Peace, Brotherly Kindness, to be of one mind, to study one thing. O follow the things that make for Peace, and not to contend, dispute, and strive one with another.* A blessed Doctrin, and it has a blessed Reward. The Lord God Almighty dispose your Minds, *my Friends*, to a tender returning state, and frighten not your selves with Designs (of the Brethren) that *have no Being, but in Jealousie and Misapprehension*: I beseech you, in the Lord, lay down every *Mark or Ensign* of Difference or Separation, and behold our Arms as open as ever, to receive you, and *let your Heart be as our Heart*, and then our Meetings your Meetings: Let the *Fear and Awe* of the Lord, the becoming *love* of his precious Truth, *which is Christ in us, the Hope of our Glory*, who gave himself for us, to redeem us from the Enmity, Death, and Curse Disobedience had laid us under, *melt and cement us as one lump*:

lump; Flesh of Flesh, and Bone of Bone ;
 so shall our Joy exceed our Sorrow,
 and Tears be wiped from our Eyes on
 this occasion ; and G O D our excee-
 ding Great and Glorious Rewarder, be
 our Crown, Portion, and Diadem for
 ever.

Yours,

In and for the Truth,

G. P.